



The Cold War Thaws

MAIN IDEA

EMPIRE BUILDING The Cold War began to thaw as the superpowers entered an era of uneasy diplomacy.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union continue to cooperate and maintain a cautious peace.

TERMS & NAMES

- Nikita Khrushchev
- Leonid Brezhnev
- John F. Kennedy
- Lyndon Johnson
- détente
- Richard M. Nixon
- SALT
- Ronald Reagan

SETTING THE STAGE In the postwar years, the Soviet Union kept a firm grip on its satellite countries in Eastern Europe. These countries were Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and East Germany. (Yugoslavia had broken away from Soviet control in 1948, although it remained Communist.) The Soviet Union did not allow them to direct and develop their own economies. Instead, it insisted that they develop industries to meet Soviet needs. These policies greatly hampered Eastern Europe’s economic recovery.

TAKING NOTES

Outlining Organize main ideas and details about the Cold War thaw.

I. Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe and China

A.

B.

II. From Brinkmanship to Détente

Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe and China

More moderate Soviet leaders came to power after Stalin’s death. They allowed satellite countries somewhat more independence, as long as they remained allied with the Soviet Union. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, growing protest movements in Eastern Europe threatened the Soviet grip on the region. Increasing tensions with China also diverted Soviet attention and forces.

Destalinization and Rumblings of Protest After Stalin died in 1953, [Nikita Khrushchev](#) became the dominant Soviet leader. In 1956, the shrewd, tough Khrushchev denounced Stalin for jailing and killing loyal Soviet citizens. His speech signaled the start of a policy called destalinization, or purging the country of Stalin’s memory. Workers destroyed monuments of the former dictator. Khrushchev called for “peaceful competition” with capitalist states.

But this new Soviet outlook did not change life in satellite countries. Their resentment at times turned to active protest. In October 1956, for example, the Hungarian army joined protesters to overthrow Hungary’s Soviet-controlled government. Storming through the capital, Budapest, mobs waved Hungarian flags with the Communist hammer-and-sickle emblem cut out. “From the youngest child to the oldest man,” one protester declared, “no one wants communism.”

A popular and liberal Hungarian Communist leader named Imre Nagy (IH•M•ray nahj) formed a new government. Nagy promised free elections and demanded Soviet troops leave. In response, Soviet tanks and infantry entered Budapest in November. Thousands of Hungarian freedom fighters armed themselves with pistols and bottles, but were overwhelmed. A pro-Soviet government was installed, and Nagy was eventually executed.

History Makers



Imre Nagy (1896–1958)

Imre Nagy was born into a peasant family in Hungary. During World War I, he was captured by the Soviets and recruited into their army. He then became a Communist.

Nagy held several posts in his country's Communist government, but his loyalty remained with the peasants. Because of his independent approach, he fell in and out of favor with the Soviet Union. In October 1956, he led an anti-Soviet revolt. After the Soviets forcefully put down the uprising, they tried and executed him.

In 1989, after Communists lost control of Hungary's government, Nagy was reburied with official honors.



▲ Czech demonstrators fight Soviet tanks in 1968.



Alexander Dubček (1921–1992)

Alexander Dubček was the son of a Czech Communist Party member. He moved rapidly up through its ranks, becoming party leader in 1968.

Responding to the spirit of change in the 1960s, Dubček instituted broad reforms during the so-called Prague Spring of 1968. The Soviet Union reacted by sending tanks into Prague to suppress a feared revolt. The Soviets expelled Dubček from the party. He regained political prominence in 1989, when the Communists agreed to share power in a coalition government. When Czechoslovakia split into two nations in 1992, Dubček became head of the Social Democratic Party in Slovakia.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

A Why was Nikita Khrushchev removed from power in 1964?

The Revolt in Czechoslovakia Despite the show of force in Hungary, Khrushchev lost prestige in his country as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. In 1964, party leaders voted to remove him from power. His replacement, **Leonid Brezhnev**, quickly adopted repressive domestic policies. The party enforced laws to limit such basic human rights as freedom of speech and worship. Government censors controlled what writers could publish. Brezhnev clamped down on those who dared to protest his policies. For example, the secret police arrested many dissidents, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize for literature. They then expelled him from the Soviet Union. **A**

Brezhnev made clear that he would not tolerate dissent in Eastern Europe either. His policy was put to the test in early 1968. At that time, Czech Communist leader Alexander Dubček (DOOB•chehk) loosened controls on censorship to offer his country socialism with “a human face.” This period of reform, when Czechoslovakia’s capital bloomed with new ideas, became known as Prague Spring. However, it did not survive the summer. On August 20, armed forces from the Warsaw Pact nations invaded Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev justified this invasion by claiming the Soviet Union had the right to prevent its satellites from rejecting communism, a policy known as the Brezhnev Doctrine.

The Soviet-Chinese Split While many satellite countries resisted Communist rule, China was committed to communism. In fact, to cement the ties between Communist powers, Mao and Stalin had signed a 30-year treaty of friendship in 1950. Their spirit of cooperation, however, ran out before the treaty did.

The Soviets assumed the Chinese would follow Soviet leadership in world affairs. As the Chinese grew more confident, however, they resented being in Moscow’s shadow. They began to spread their own brand of communism in Africa and other

parts of Asia. In 1959, Khrushchev punished the Chinese by refusing to share nuclear secrets. The following year, the Soviets ended technical economic aid. The Soviet-Chinese split grew so wide that fighting broke out along their common border. After repeated incidents, the two neighbors maintained a fragile peace.

From Brinkmanship to Détente

In the 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union finally backed away from the aggressive policies of brinkmanship that they had followed during the early post-war years. The superpowers slowly moved to lower tensions.

Brinkmanship Breaks Down The brinkmanship policy followed during the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson led to one terrifying crisis after another. Though these crises erupted all over the world, they were united by a common fear. Nuclear war seemed possible.

In 1960, the U-2 incident prevented a meeting between the United States and the Soviet Union to discuss the buildup of arms on both sides. Then, during the administration of **John F. Kennedy** in the early 1960s, the Cuban Missile Crisis made the superpowers' use of nuclear weapons a real possibility. (See page 985.) The crisis ended when Soviet ships turned back to avoid a confrontation at sea. "We're eyeball to eyeball," the relieved U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, "and I think the other fellow just blinked." But Kennedy's secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, admitted how close the world had come to disaster:

PRIMARY SOURCE **B**

In the face of an air attack [on Cuba] and in the face of the probability of a ground attack, it was certainly possible, and I would say probable, that a Cuban sergeant or Soviet officer in a missile silo, without authority from Moscow, would have launched one or more of those intermediate-range missiles, equipped with a nuclear warhead, against one or more of the cities on the East Coast of the United States.

ROBERT MCNAMARA, quoted in *Inside the Cold War*

Tensions remained high. After the assassination of Kennedy in 1963, **Lyndon Johnson** assumed the presidency. Committed to stopping the spread of communism, President Johnson escalated U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam.

The United States Turns to Détente Widespread popular protests wracked the United States during the Vietnam War. And the turmoil did not end with U.S. withdrawal. As it tried to heal its internal wounds, the United States backed away from its policy of direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. **Détente**, a policy of lessening Cold War tensions, replaced brinkmanship under **Richard M. Nixon**.

President Nixon's move toward détente grew out of a philosophy known as realpolitik. This term comes from the German word meaning "realistic politics." In practice, realpolitik meant dealing with other nations in a practical and flexible manner. While the United States continued to try to contain the spread of communism, the two superpowers agreed to pursue détente and to reduce tensions.

Nixon Visits Communist Powers Nixon's new policy represented a personal reversal as well as a political shift for the country. His rise in politics in the 1950s was largely due to his strong anti-Communist position. Twenty years later, he became the first U.S. president to visit Communist China. The visit made sense in a world in which three, not just two,

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Primary Sources

B Do you think that Robert McNamara's view of the Soviet threat in Cuba was justified? Explain.

Vocabulary

Détente is a French word meaning "a loosening."

▼ U.S. president Nixon visits China in 1972, accompanied by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai (left).



superpowers eyed each other suspiciously. “We want the Chinese with us when we sit down and negotiate with the Russians,” Nixon explained.

Three months after visiting Beijing in February 1972, Nixon visited the Soviet Union. After a series of meetings called the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks ([SALT](#)), Nixon and Brezhnev signed the SALT I Treaty. This five-year agreement, limited to 1972 levels the number of intercontinental ballistic and submarine-launched missiles each country could have. In 1975, 33 nations joined the United States and the Soviet Union in signing a commitment to détente and cooperation, the Helsinki Accords.



▲ Ronald Reagan's 1980 political button highlights the strong patriotic theme of his campaign.

The Collapse of Détente

Under presidents Nixon and Gerald Ford, the United States improved relations with China and the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s, however, President Jimmy Carter was concerned over harsh treatment of protesters in the Soviet Union. This threatened to prevent a second round of SALT negotiations. In 1979, Carter and Brezhnev finally signed the SALT II agreement. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan later that year, however, the U.S. Congress refused to ratify SALT II. Concerns mounted as more nations, including China and India, began building nuclear arsenals.

Reagan Takes an Anti-Communist Stance A fiercely anti-Communist U.S. president, [Ronald Reagan](#), took office in 1981. He continued to move away from détente. He increased defense spending, putting both economic and military pressure on the Soviets. In 1983, Reagan also announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a program to protect against enemy missiles. It was not put into effect but remained a symbol of U.S. anti-Communist sentiment.

Tensions increased as U.S. activities such as arming Nicaragua's Contras pushed the United States and Soviet Union further from détente. However, a change in Soviet leadership in 1985 brought a new policy toward the United States and the beginnings of a final thaw in the Cold War. Meanwhile, as you will learn in the next chapter, developing countries continued their own struggles for independence.

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

C In what ways did Nixon's and Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union differ?

SECTION

5

ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

• Nikita Khrushchev • Leonid Brezhnev • John F. Kennedy • Lyndon Johnson • détente • Richard M. Nixon • SALT • Ronald Reagan

USING YOUR NOTES

2. What do you consider the most significant reason for the collapse of détente?

I. Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe and China

A.

B.

II. From Brinkmanship to Détente

MAIN IDEAS

3. What effects did destalinization have on Soviet satellite countries?

4. What changes did Alexander Dubček seek to make in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and what happened?

5. Why was the policy of brinkmanship replaced?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE In view of Soviet policies toward Eastern Europe in the postwar era, what reasons did people in Eastern Europe have for resistance?

7. EVALUATING DECISIONS Do you think it was a wise political move for Nixon to visit Communist China and the Soviet Union? Why or why not?

8. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS What was the result of Reagan's move away from détente?

9. WRITING ACTIVITY [REVOLUTION](#) Write a short poem or song lyrics expressing protest against Communist rule by a citizen of a country behind the Iron Curtain.

CONNECT TO TODAY WRITING A SUMMARY

Look through a major newspaper or newsmagazine for articles on Eastern European countries. Then, write a brief **summary** of recent developments there.